

## **ALASKA STATEWIDE PROTOCOLS FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT RESPONSE TEAMS**

### **I. Purpose:**

These protocols are designed to provide standardized structure for the development, training, and implementation of sexual assault response teams throughout the state of Alaska.

### **II. Introduction:**

The Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) is a multi-disciplinary team developed to improve services to victims of sexual assault. The team is comprised of advocates from the local victim service center, law enforcement officers, and specially trained health care professionals. These team members provide a coordinated, efficient, and supportive response to victims. The benefit of the SART is the ability to provide a full range of comprehensive services to victims who have made the decision to report a sexual assault. This occurs by providing immediate crisis intervention, team interviews, forensic examination, and follow-up as needed. This coordinated response leads to a bond between the victim and the advocate, enables law enforcement to receive a foundation of facts regarding the case, and provides for forensic evidence for prosecution of the sexual offender.

SART teams are established to:

- A. Meet the immediate needs of the victim with crisis intervention and support services.
- B. Provide a joint, effective, sensitive approach to victims of sexual assault.
- C. Conduct an investigation of the crime.
- D. Document and preserve forensic evidence for prosecuting the perpetrator of the crime.

**NOTE:** Communities that will incorporate their child sexual abuse response protocols with their local sexual assault response team should reference the Alaska Interdepartmental Child Abuse Agreement. This document is available from: The Alaska Children's Cabinet, P.O. Box 112100, Juneau, AK, 99811; phone 907-465-4870, fax 907-465-8638.

### **III. Steering Committee:**

The purpose of the steering committee is to create a structure that provides for initial and ongoing management of the response team. This serves as the structure for addressing any concerns that may arise as the SART progresses. Each SART should have a steering committee comprised of a representative of the following disciplines: local victim advocacy, law enforcement, and health care. The steering committee should develop a method of quality control that may include team meetings or some other problem-solving process. Membership of this group should also include all law enforcement entities in the area, a representative of the District Attorney's office, and others from the community that work as members of a coordinated response to sexual assault cases.

#### **IV. Team Structure:**

##### **A. Members**

Protocols must clearly identify members of the response team. Members should include:

1. A victim advocate
2. A law enforcement officer
3. A health care professional

##### **B. Roles of Team Members:**

###### 1. Advocate:

Advocates provide support to the victim, answer any questions the victim may have, and inform the victim of the process for the interview and examination. The advocate does not participate in the gathering of evidence, fact-finding, or the investigation of the assault. Rather, their focus is placed on insuring that the victim is supported throughout the process. As advocates often provide individual and group support for months and sometimes years to come, the initial bond that develops between advocate and victim is critical. Advocates do not provide an opinion on the merits of the case or participate in conducting the interview, and generally will not testify in court.

###### 2. Law Enforcement:

Law enforcement's role is to investigate and report the facts of the case. Law enforcement will be responsible for the immediate safety needs of the victim; interviewing the victim; investigation of the crime; identifying, arresting, and/or referring charges on the suspect; arranging for forensic examination of the suspect when necessary, writing a report, participating in court proceedings, and all other duties normally associated with investigative and law enforcement functions.

###### 3. Health Care Professional:

The health care professional's role is to provide the health care component of the SART. They perform the physical assessment of the sexual assault victim; collect, document, and preserve forensic evidence; provide information and referral to the victim on health care matters; document the examination in the medical record; and present expert testimony in court.

#### **V. Training Recommendations:**

Cross training of the roles and responsibilities of each team component is strongly recommended in order to maintain the multi-disciplinary approach and insure its success. This shall include:

##### **A. Advocate training includes:**

1. An overview of the forensic interview, law enforcement investigation, forensic examination, and the legal process as related to sexual assault
2. Observation of a sexual assault trial

3. Supporting preceptorship needs of other team members

**B. Law Enforcement training includes:**

1. An overview of the forensic examination and victim advocacy process.
2. Sexual assault investigation
3. Interviewing techniques
4. Supporting preceptorship needs of other team members

**C. Health Care Professional training includes:**

1. The minimum requirements as recommended by the Forensic Nursing Association of Alaska Standards of Practice.
2. Supporting preceptorship needs of other team members.

**VI. Overall Structure:**

This section of the protocol should include:

**A. Facility Location:**

1. Identify facility that will be used for the forensic examination and interviews
2. Specifications regarding physical layout of the designated area to insure:
  - a) Treatment priority given to victim
  - b) Privacy for victim
  - c) Safety of victim
3. Identify the contact person at the facility
4. Clear procedures for initiating and implementing call-out response
5. Insure location maintains all necessary supplies for the examination

**B. Health Care Professionals**

1. Completed didactic training and preceptorship for health care professional prior to performing examinations as the primary health care professional
2. Documentation of valid medical/nursing license in the state of Alaska

**C. Law Enforcement**

1. Identify law enforcement entity that will be responsible for each location
2. Identify the contact person at law enforcement agency
3. The officer will, when possible, complete training as outlined in protocols prior to responding to a SART call

**D. Victim Advocacy**

1. Identify the contact person at the victim advocacy agency
2. The advocate will, when possible, complete training as outlined in protocols prior to responding to a SART call

**E. Debriefing**

1. It is strongly recommended that team members develop a process for debriefing each case.

## **VII. Service Availability**

Identify service parameters, which should include:

- A. Hours of operation
- B. Contact person for each of the service areas
- C. Procedures for outlying areas to access the team
- D. Ages served
- E. Military or other regional considerations
- F. Geographic areas
- G. Procedures for examinations of victims
  - 1. To be provided by a health care professional
  - 2. Timeline
  - 3. Chain of evidence
  - 4. Standing orders
- H. Procedures for examinations for perpetrators:
  - 1. To be provided by law enforcement or health care professional
  - 2. Location of perpetrator examination
  - 3. Chain of evidence

## **VIII. Call-Out Procedures:**

Procedures must be created to insure a smooth and effective call-out response. The procedures must:

- A. Clearly identify procedure for activating a response
- B. Identify contact person for each component of SART
- C. Identify appropriate timeline for call-out response

## **IX. Forensic Examination Consent Form:**

This section of the protocols must address:

- A. Consent for examination, evidence, and photographic evidence release
- B. Consent for communication between team members
- C. Consent forms must clearly define waiver of privacy

## **X. Interview Process:**

Guidelines should address the following:

- A. That medical priorities, victim needs, and safety considerations take precedence over the forensic interview and forensic examination
- B. That all efforts have been made to have all team members are present for the interview
- C. That whenever possible, the victim should be given the opportunity to speak with a victim advocate prior to the start of the interview, to explain:
  - 1. The victim's rights regarding the interview and examination
  - 2. The process and structure of the interview and the examination
  - 3. The process of any audio/video taping that will occur

## **XI. Payment of Services:**

This section of the protocols should include:

- A. Procedure to ensure that victims will not be charged for forensic examinations either directly or through insurance billing
- B. Procedure for covering costs of injuries or medical needs other than those of the forensic examination.

## **XII. Violent Crimes Compensation:**

This section of the protocols should include the following:

- A. That law enforcement is to provide notice of Violent Crimes Compensation
- B. That the advocate can provide assistance in completing forms, and provide contact numbers and referrals for additional information

## **XIII. Examination:**

This section of the protocols must include:

- A. Specific procedures outlining the steps for forensic examination
- B. Procedures for follow-up care and referral
- C. Standing orders

## **XIV. Confidentiality:**

This section of the protocols should address the following:

- A. That forensic examination records will be maintained in a separate and secure location
- B. A procedure for processing subpoenas, search warrants, and court orders
- C. Disclosure of the information that is required by law

*NOTE: Advocates are generally excluded from disclosing information.*

## **XV. Chain of evidence:**

This section of the protocols must include:

- A. Procedure for forensic examiners and law enforcement to insure chain of evidence is maintained.

## **XVI. Timeline for Examinations**

This section of the should address the following:

- A. It is strongly recommended that the forensic exam be completed as soon as possible.
- B. Suitability for a forensic examination should be decided on a case by case basis.